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## Price Of Membership: The Effect Of Income On A Sense Of Belonging To Canada

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# PRICE OF MEMBERSHIP: THE EFFECT OF INCOME ON A SENSE OF BELONGING TO CANADA

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## INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

Liberal market capitalism, the dominant economic system in Canada, permeates daily life and carries important social consequences for Canadian citizens (Esping-Andersen and Myles 2008:52). One expects all social relationships between individuals to be mediated, in some degree, by capital and class position under a free market society (Esping-Andersen and Myles 2008:52). This raises an interesting question regarding the relationship between the individual and society itself: does the amount of economic resources possessed by an individual influence their sense of belonging to Canada?

This research question stems from the larger public issue of marginalization. Self-perceived inclusion or exclusion to society depends on an array of personal background characteristics, an important one of which is economic standing. Although legislation in Canada promotes inclusion by curtailing exclusionary ideologies like racism and sexism, marginalization that results from income inequality has increased over time (Hacker and Pierson 2010:102). This study examines Canadians' economic positions, measured by annual personal income, as a determinant of their sense of belonging to Canada. In addition to this bivariate relationship, it also investigates the role of known correlates of exclusion, such as being a victim of discrimination, having visible minority status, and being of a particular sex (Sommerfeld

2011:66). By controlling for these known correlates of exclusion, this study hopes to determine whether or not a sense of belonging in today's advanced capitalist society can truly be attributed to annual personal income. Findings could lend insight into which of the variables influence individuals' sense of belonging, and could be applied towards policy suggestions to direct trends of social cohesion in Canada. For example, if income alone has a strong influence on Canadians' sense of belonging, then discussion might center on policy changes relevant to income inequality or poverty (such as redistribution and social safety nets) (Esping-Andersen and Myles 2008:53). However, if findings show that visible minority status or experiences of discrimination have a significant impact on one's sense of belonging, then it may also be important to suggest policies that promote anti-discrimination and anti-racism with respect to Canada's diverse population (Sommerfeld 2011:121). Lastly, if sex is found to significantly impact one's sense of belonging, more research is required to explain how differences in the lived experiences of males and females impact their social integration and hold policy implications for cohesion in Canada.

### *Resource Theory*

This study departs from the ideas of 'resource theory.' Resource theory seeks to understand the impact of various stressors and background characteristics of individuals on their quality of life (Cheung et al. 2013:279). The theory states that resources, defined as valuable assets that contribute to people's subsistence, work, and function, partly determine their sense of belonging (Cheung et al. 2013:279). A depletion of resources weakens a sense of belonging, while an increase in resources amplifies a sense of belonging for individuals toward their society (Cheung et al. 2013:279). Stressors (which deplete resources) include costly medical care, job insecurity, and the loss of income, investment, or employment (Cheung et al. 2013:280). According to resource theory, these stressors are prevalent in post-industrialized societies

because the economic security of citizens is threatened by rapid changes in work structure associated with industrialization (Cheung et al. 2013:281). Unemployment, for example, is a common effect of post-industrialization (Cheung et al. 2013:281). As a stressor, it produces shame and stigma for individuals, which, in turn, weakens their sense of belonging (Cheung et al. 2013:281).

Resource theory is relevant to this study because it highlights the existing correlation between the amount of economic resources an individual possesses and their sense of belonging to society. Premises from the theory lead this study to hypothesize that the bivariate relationship under examination will have a positive direction; that is, individuals with a higher annual personal income will have a stronger sense of belonging. Furthermore, resource theory is applicable because Canada is a post-industrialized nation impacted by workplace transformations, such as globalization, skill-biased technological change, and a growing service economy, all of which could represent stressors for individuals (Goldin and Katz 2008:75). This study therefore expects an association between income and sense of belonging for Canadians.

#### *Lack of Resources and Social Isolation*

Other studies demonstrate the strong effect of socioeconomic status on social isolation (Stewart et al. 2009:174). This relationship is systemic: higher-income individuals are 1.59 times more likely than those below the low-income cut-off to report feeling a sense of belonging to their community (Stewart et al. 2009:187). Conversely, in self-reports, lower-income individuals are almost three times more likely to identify their lack of economic resources as the reason for their social isolation when compared to higher-income individuals (Stewart et al. 2009:184). Research suggests that this is because low incomes hinder individuals' ability to live in their choice of neighborhood and afford participation in social and civic activities (Stewart et al.

2009:184). Unemployed individuals are also barred from meaningful interactions in the labour market (Stewart et al. 2009:184). Therefore, a lack of economic resources is a structural factor that can increase the amount of exclusion that individuals experience in their immediate community (Stewart et al. 2009:184).

These findings offer an extension to resource theory by identifying important causal mechanisms driving the relationship between one's economic standing and sense of belonging. They also lend support to, and provide explanations for a possible association between the annual personal income and sense of belonging of Canadians in this study.

## HYPOTHESIS

Although this study derives from previous literature, it fills a gap in research by testing the relationship between individuals' economic standing and their national identification in the Canadian context. It also takes an intersectional approach by examining visible minority status and sex as variables that may affect experiences of belonging, in addition to economic status. This study hypothesizes that participants with a higher annual personal income will have a stronger sense of belonging to Canada regardless of being a victim of discrimination, visible minority status, and sex.

## DATA & METHODS

### *Description of the Sample*

The sample used in this study is from the 2013 General Social Survey (GSS), which contains questions of social identity, community networks, and civic participation (Statistics Canada 2015). The target population of the GSS includes all non-institutionalized persons aged 15 years or older, living in Canada's 10 provinces (Statistics Canada 2014). The primary investigator for the 2013 GSS was the Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division of Statistics

Canada, which used computer-assisted telephone interviewing and electronic questionnaires to collect data for the reference period of June 3, 2013 to March 31, 2014 (Statistics Canada 2014). The 2013 GSS uses a cross-sectional design and employs stratified probability sampling to obtain information from 27 695 respondents, which represents an overall response rate of 48.1% (Statistics Canada 2014).

### *Variables*

The independent variable in this study is the 2012 Annual Personal Income of respondents and has a sample size of 20 541 respondents. The twelve original categories of this variable in the GSS (ranging from “No Income” to “\$100 000 or more”) were recoded into two categories for this study: namely, “Below Median” and “Above Median.” This is in reference to the median annual personal income of Canadians in 2012, which is roughly \$54 000 (Statistics Canada 2017). The recoded “Below Median” category includes respondents with annual personal incomes of \$0 - \$49 999 while the “Above Median” category includes respondents with annual personal incomes of \$50 000 - \$100 000 or more. The Annual Personal Income variable is recoded this way for simplicity and with considerations toward the skill limitations of the researcher. “Valid Skip,” “Don’t Know,” “Refusal,” and “Not Stated” GSS categories for this variable contained 6 993 cases and were recoded as missing values in the system.

The dependent variable in this study is the respondent’s Sense of Belonging to Canada, which has a sample size of 27 312 respondents. Original categories of this variable from the GSS were recoded into “Weak” and “Strong” categories. The “Strong” category includes the “Very Strong” and “Somewhat Strong” categories from the GSS, while the “Weak” category includes the “Somewhat Weak,” “Very Weak,” “No Opinion,” and “Don’t Know” categories from the GSS. Both the “No Opinion” and “Don’t Know” GSS categories were coded into the “Weak”

category of this study because, conceptually, apathetic or uncertain answers signify the weakness of a sense of belonging. The categories “Valid Skip,” “Don’t Know,” “Refusal,” and “Not Stated” were again recoded as missing values (they contained a total of 292 cases).

The first control variable in this study measures whether or not the respondent was a Victim of Discrimination in the past 5 years, and has a sample size of 26 615 respondents. Original GSS categories of “Yes” and “No” were retained for this study while “Valid Skip,” “Don’t Know,” “Refusal,” and “Not Stated” categories (which contained 919 cases) were recoded as missing values in the system.

The second control variable is the Visible Minority status of the respondent, which has a sample size of 27 188 respondents. As with the first control variable, categories of “Valid Skip,” “Don’t Know,” “Refusal,” and “Not Stated” from the original GSS (346 cases in total) were recoded as missing values. GSS categories of “Visible Minority” and “Not a Visible Minority” remained as they were.

The final control variable categorizes the Sex of the respondent, and has a sample size of 27 534. Original GSS categories of “Male” and “Female” were retained for this study while the categories of “Valid Skip,” “Don’t Know,” “Refusal,” and “Not Stated” from the GSS were recoded as missing values (they each contained 0 cases).

#### *Methods of analysis*

Frequency distributions were first created for each variable. A cross tabulation was then formed, and chi-square and p-values were determined to test the bivariate relationship between the annual personal income and sense of belonging of respondents. Each control variable was subsequently layered into the bivariate relationship one at a time and cross tabulations, chi-square values, and p-values were generated again for the multivariate relationship.

## RESULTS

### *Univariate Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Table 1. Frequency Distribution of All Variables Used in the Study</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Percent Frequency</b>
Annual Personal Income (Independent)	Below Median	65.2%
	Above Median	34.8%
Sense of Belonging to Canada (Dependent)	Weak	7.9%
	Strong	92.1%
Victim of Discrimination (Control)	Victim of Discrimination	30.6%
	Not a Victim of Discrimination	69.4%
Visible Minority (Control)	Visible Minority	22.8%
	Not a Visible Minority	77.2%
Sex (Control)	Male	45.8%
	Female	54.2%

Source: 2013 General Social Science Survey

N = 20 541 (Annual Personal Income), 27 312 (Sense of Belonging to Canada), 26 615 (Victim of Discrimination), 27 188 (Visible Minority), 27 534 (Sex)

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for all variables used in this study. For Annual Personal Income, 65.2% of respondents fall in the “Below Median” category while 34.8% fall in the “Above Median” category; thus, more Canadians have annual personal incomes below the national median compared to those with incomes above it. Regarding the Sense of Belonging to Canada variable, 7.9% of respondents belong to the “Weak” category while 92.1% belong to the “Strong” category, signifying that an overwhelming proportion of respondents have a strong sense of belonging to their country. The Victim of Discrimination variable shows that fewer respondents were victims of discrimination in the past 5 years than those who were not victims of discrimination, since 30.6% of respondents answered with “Yes” and 69.4% answered “No.”



For Visible Minority status, 22.8% of respondents identify as a visible minority while 77.2% do not, demonstrating that a much smaller portion of Canadians identify as a visible minority than those who do not. Lastly, regarding Sex, 45.8% of respondents identify as Male and 54.2% identify as Female, indicating that there are slightly more females than males in this sample.

### *Bivariate Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Table 2. Sense of Belonging to Canada by Annual Personal Income</b>		
<b>Sense of Belonging to Canada</b>	<b>Annual Personal Income</b>	
	<b>Below Median</b>	<b>Above Median</b>
Weak	8.5%	5.9%
Strong	91.5%	94.1%
Total	100%	100%
(N)	13 360	7 132

Source: 2013 General Social Science Survey

N = 20 492

Missing Cases = 7 042

Chi-Square = 45.003 ( $p < 0.001$ ) but not substantively significant

Table 2 shows that individuals with annual personal incomes above the Canadian median annual personal income comprise the largest proportion of respondents with a strong sense of belonging, at 94.1%. This is followed by individuals with annual personal incomes below the median income, 91.5% of whom have a strong sense of belonging. The 2.6% difference in Sense of Belonging between those with incomes above and below the median is very small. There is a statistically significant but very weak relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada.

*Multivariate Descriptive Statistics: Adding Victim of Discrimination*

**Table 3. Sense of Belonging to Canada by Annual Personal Income and Victim of Discrimination**

Sense of Belonging to Canada	Victim of Discrimination		Not a Victim of Discrimination	
	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median
Weak	10.6%	8.1%	7.4%	5.0%
Strong	89.4%	91.9%	92.6%	95.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	4 227	2 051	8 901	4883

Source: 2013 General Social Science Survey

N = 20 062

Missing Cases = 7 472

Chi-Square = 41.528 (p<0.001)

Table 3 shows that controlling for the Victim of Discrimination variable alters the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada. Compared to Table 2, a smaller proportion of victims of discrimination have a strong sense of belonging (in both income categories) while a larger proportion of non-victims of discrimination have a strong sense of belonging.

For victims of discrimination, there is a 2.5% difference between those whose incomes were below and above the median income, regarding their sense of belonging. For non-victims of discrimination, the difference is 2.4%. Because the percentage differences between the two income categories shrinks for both categories of the Victim of Discrimination variable, some of the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada can be attributed to this control variable. Victim of Discrimination is thus a confounding variable and differences in individuals' sense of belonging to Canada can be explained not only by their income, but partly by whether or not they were a victim of discrimination in the past 5 years.

*Multivariate Descriptive Statistics: Adding Visible Minority*

**Table 4. Sense of Belonging to Canada by Annual Personal Income and Visible Minority**

Sense of Belonging to Canada	Visible Minority		Not a Visible Minority	
	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median
Weak	7.6%	4.5%	8.8%	6.2%
Strong	92.4%	95.5%	91.2%	93.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	3 508	1 245	9 778	5 857

Source: 2013 General Social Science Survey

N = 20 388

Missing Cases = 7 146

Chi-Square = 45.077 (p<0.001)

Controlling for Visible Minority status slightly increases the percentage difference that exists in the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging for individuals who identify as a visible minority. There is a 3.1% difference between visible minorities who are below and above the Canadian annual personal income, with respect to their sense of belonging. This increase in percent difference demonstrates an increased distance from the null hypothesis, and is an interaction effect that shows Sense of Belonging depends, in part, on visible minority status. For respondents who do not identify as a visible minority, the difference is 2.6%, which is identical to the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging. Income produces a larger difference in Sense of Belonging for visible minorities than for respondents who are not visible minorities. The proportion of visible minorities that have a strong sense of belonging is also higher than the proportion of respondents who are not visible minorities, regardless of annual personal income.

*Multivariate Descriptive Statistics: Adding Sex*

**Table 5. Sense of Belonging to Canada by Annual Personal Income and Sex**

Sense of Belonging to Canada	Male		Female	
	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median
Weak	9.4%	5.9%	7.9%	6.0%
Strong	90.6%	94.1%	92.1%	94.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	5 490	4 304	7 870	2 828

Source: 2013 General Social Science Survey

N = 20 492

Missing Cases = 7 042

Chi-Square = 45.003 (p<0.001)

Percentage differences in the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging vary most widely when controlling for the Sex variable. There is a 3.5% difference between male respondents who are below and above the Canadian median annual personal income, regarding their sense of belonging. This increase from the 2.6% difference in the bivariate relationship (in Table 2) shows an interaction effect from the Sex variable. The effect of Annual Personal Income on Sense of Belonging depends on Sex; specifically, being a male influences one's Sense of Belonging in a way that Annual Personal Income cannot account for. The influence of Annual Personal Income on Sense of Belonging is more important for males than for females. In contrast, there is a 1.9% difference between female respondents who are below and above the Canadian annual personal income, for each Sense of Belonging category.

## CONCLUSIONS

### *Findings*

This study initially hypothesized that participants with a higher annual personal income will have a stronger sense of belonging to Canada regardless of being a victim of discrimination, visible minority status, and sex. Findings show some (weak) support for this hypothesis.

Although the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada is statistically significant and weak, it is likely not substantively significant. It shows that respondents generally feel a strong sense of belonging to Canada regardless of their economic position above or below the median annual personal income. The data only weakly suggests that individuals with higher incomes tend to experience a stronger sense of belonging. However, levels of belonging are also explained by whether or not respondents have been a victim of discrimination in the past 5 years, an issue separate from their annual personal income. Within the relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada, differences in Sense of Belonging depend on visible minority status as well as whether or not the respondent is male. These results may be partly explained by the limitations of this study.

### *Limitations*

One issue in this study is that results may be statistically significant due to the sheer size of the sample. Although the bivariate relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada is statistically significant, it is very weak. The percentage differences between categories of variables show that the magnitude of the association is very small, and probably unimportant. It is possible that the bivariate relationship exists only due to a large sample size, and that another variable may have stronger causality. The recoding of original GSS variables is another limitation in this study since condensed data results in a loss of information. The bivariate relationship may have a stronger association if the Annual Personal Income

variable is recoded into three or more graded categories of income instead. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the GSS data, which makes the data's accuracy dependent on respondents' memories and willingness to report. Responses to the Victim of Discrimination variable (based on experiences within the past 5 years) may be inaccurate because the topic's sensitivity and long reference period could lead to underreporting from discomfort or forgetfulness. Additionally, self-reports of experiences of discrimination in the GSS were not directly observed, and cannot be later verified by the researcher. These issues may decrease the accuracy of the data.

### *Discussion*

Although this study finds weak support for a relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada, respondents generally feel a strong sense of belonging to Canada regardless of their economic position. For the weak relationship that exists, a higher income correlates to a stronger sense of belonging for Canadians. This relationship also depends on sex and visible minority status, which indicates a direction for future research. To explain the Sex variable, constructions of masculinity should be investigated to determine the mechanisms by which sex (specifically, being a male respondent) plays a role in determining the influence of income on a sense of belonging. Are men's identities and self-concepts more dependent on their labour market position than are women's? That is an area of research worth investigating next because the internalization of cultural narratives surrounding masculinity could potentially explain the results of this study. Additionally, to explain why the relationship between Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada also depends on visible minority status, future studies should examine the experience of being a visible minority on the labour market. Perhaps there is an association between visible minority status and the

performance of certain jobs (e.g. those that are perceived as ‘undesirable’ by society), which influences an individual’s sense of belonging. For example, certain ‘undesirable’ and poorly-paid jobs could be more frequently held by people with visible minority status, and correlate to their higher feelings of social exclusion. This would explain why Annual Personal Income and Sense of Belonging to Canada depends, in part, on Visible Minority status.

Overall, the results of this study do not provide strong support for resource theory or point to a need for policies addressing individuals’ economic position as a means of strengthening their sense of belonging to Canada. An overwhelming majority of Canadians feel a strong sense of belonging to their country, irrespective of their personal annual income. This is a promising finding regarding the social cohesion and national identity of Canadians.

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